

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

MARCH 9, 2015

TESTIMONY OF CLAIRE SAUER IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 1051
"AN ACT STRENGTHENING CONNECTICUT'S ELECTIONS"

Chairman Cassano, Chairman Jutila and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee: I had the pleasure of serving as state representative from the 36th district from 1995-2001. I am a former member of the Board of Directors of Common Cause of Connecticut and I have been a member of the League of Women Voters for decades. Today I am submitting testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 1051, "An Act Strengthening Connecticut's Elections."

No matter where any of us are on the political spectrum there are common American values we all share, and one of them is that we treasure our American tradition of democracy. Whether we have the privilege of serving in public office, or doing grassroots organizing, or simply being a voter, we have chosen to engage in this process because we believe that it matters. It's how our communities and our nation make decisions.

How we conduct elections is important enough to make a priority, and our democracy is important enough to demand excellence.

Today the quality of our elections rests in the hands of the registrars of voters. As you know, registrars are hand-picked by the major party town committees. There is no required vetting process. Many registrars are selected on the basis of their commitment to their party, longtime service to the party or because no one else was willing to take on the job. While they technically run in an election, they cannot lose. Once elected, they cannot be removed from office for neglect, incompetence or even malfeasance.

It's an old fashioned system and its time to reform it. I can't even think of one other job that a private entity – in this case the two town committees – hire for a job paid by the town without regard to any requirements.

We need to make sure that those who serve can do the job well. When there are ballot shortages, or when the polls just fail to open like has happened in the last two gubernatorial elections, the impact of those failures can never truly be rectified. We cannot ever be 100% certain that those voters who were turned away or walked away were ever able to make it back to vote.

This bill isn't just about isolated incidents. While there have been high profile incidents in recent years, there have been errors and dysfunction in small and large

towns across the state, many of which can be traced to the two-registrar model. These problems affect us all. They make voters feel like they cannot trust our election system – giving them yet another reason not to bother to vote. And for those candidates in a multi-town district or statewide ballot it could be the margin of victory.

It behooves us all to make sure that our elections are the best they can be. And to me that means the next move is to transform the registrar position into a professional, non-partisan job. When we make that change, we can improve consistency and accountability because we can mandate qualifications, skills, and ongoing training.

Thank you for your time.